



UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

News Writing

Study Packet 2020

This News Writing packet contains tests and keys from **only** 2020 Invitational A, B, District and Region. State is not available.

This item is intended for High School grade levels.

News Writing

Invitational A Meet • 2020



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a **news story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **45 minutes**. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 2,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Two years ago, the high school changed from a traditional seven-period day to an eight-period block schedule where students attend four classes on A day and four classes on B day. Since the switch, the Student Council has asked the administration to create some sort of study hall time for students. The Student Council officers say students are overwhelmed with eight classes and need some time during the school day to do homework.

This week, Principal John Eduardo suggested the school add a 40-minute flex time into the schedule every day after first and fifth period. Students could work on homework or go to a teacher for help on an assignment during the flex period. In January, Eduardo visited two schools in Central Texas that have flex periods. Those administrators say the new schedule has reduced failure rates at their respective schools.

Eduardo pitched the idea to the faculty. About half of the faculty support the plan, but the other half said they do not want to lose 10 minutes from each class to create this flex period. The Student Council officers support the idea and so does the Parent-Teacher Association.

The flex period would not start until after spring break and would need school board approval. Eduardo will take his proposal to the school board meeting Thursday, Feb. 13. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Wednesday, Feb. 12

■ JOHN EDUARDO, principal

“When our school switched to block scheduling two years ago, our failure rates did increase slightly. That is not something you want to see. For more than a year, the Student Council officers have complained that homework loads have increased with the new schedule. The officers have been asking for some type of relief to help students out, and my administrative team has been exploring options. After visiting the two schools in Central Texas, I was sold on the flex period. At first, I worried that it would be wasted time, but I was amazed at the number of students working or getting help during the flex period at those schools. Very few students were just messing around. And those principals said their failure rates decreased.

“What I like about the flex period is students will have flexibility. We will set up an online check-in system where students can put in where they want to flex. For instance, each student will have an assigned flex teacher, but if they fill out the online flex portal, they can move to any teacher they want. Let’s say I need help in geometry. Then, I can flex into that teacher’s class and get help. I simply have to put that into the online system. Honestly, it’s pretty genius. At those two schools, we saw so many students getting individual help. Students

■ JOHN EDUARDO (cont.)

who don't need help can flex into a club or the gym or other extracurricular — if that teacher approves.

“I know some of our teachers are not excited about this. They don't think it will work. But the schools we visited had similar populations, and it was quite successful. Teachers also complained about losing 10 minutes of their classes. I understand that. But if this helps our passing rate and our student stress, then it's worth it. Teachers will need to be more creative with how they teach and possibly condense some information.”

■ MCKENZIE COOPER, junior and Student Council officer

“Mr. Eduardo told the officers about this flex idea a few weeks ago. The Student Council thinks it's a great idea. Eight classes is tough for students. We need some relief. I play volleyball and softball, so for most of the school year I am either staying late for practice or games. I don't have much time at night to do homework. It was hard with seven classes. It's almost impossible with eight. I often stay up past midnight doing homework. Everyone thought it would be easier with block scheduling because we only have four classes a day, but teachers are giving us twice as much homework as before. It's too much.”

■ ESMI VEGA, social studies teacher

“I teach three sections of AP World History. Since we went to block scheduling, I have less time with my students each school year. It is extremely difficult to cover all of the material during our school year. Yes, homework has increased, but it had to. I only see the students two to three times a week. Now, the administration wants to make our class time even shorter. I don't know how I will get through the curriculum. And if I don't, my students won't be prepared for the AP test. Maybe instead of this flex period, we need to go back to the regular seven-period day. The AP teachers do not support the flex period. We can't. We don't have enough time to cover the curriculum.”

■ DANIEL POLLARD, English teacher

“I teach four sections of junior AP English. I can't lose one minute of class time if we want any of our students to get a three or four on the AP exam. We need more time with our students, not less.”

■ WILSON UKEJE, freshman

“The flex period would definitely help me. I feel like the only thing I do after school is homework. My parents also cannot help me with my math anymore. If I could visit with my math teacher a few times a week, I would have a much better grade in math.”

■ MONICA TORRES, athletic director

“All of the coaches support this flex period. Since we moved to block scheduling, we try to use half of our athletic period as a study hall, which cuts into our practice time. But if our athletes aren't passing, they aren't playing. We have seen a spike in failing grades in the last two years. The flex period is a solid idea to help our students.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Under the seven-period school day, students received 170 hours of instruction in each class, each year. With block scheduling, students receive 135 hours of instruction. The flex period would reduce that time even further, to 124 hours of instruction per class, per year.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

INVITATIONAL A • 2020

NEWS WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Open with a future lead under the present circumstances. In this instance, the story comes out before the board votes on the flex period proposal.

A 40-minute flex period could be added to the schedule after spring break if the school board approves Principal John Eduardo's proposal at its meeting tomorrow. The daily flex period would serve as a study hall for students, Eduardo said.

2. Use direct quotes and get those quotes early in the story. After you introduce quotes, use the transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Eduardo said," not "said Eduardo.") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes from different people together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

This flex period would take place after first and fifth period every day. Both the Student Council and the Parent-Teacher Association support the proposal.

direct quote

"The Student Council thinks it's a great idea," McKenzie Cooper, a junior and Student Council officer, said. "Eight classes is tough for students. We need some relief."

transition

When the school switched to block scheduling two years ago, failure rates increased, Eduardo said.

direct quote

"That is not something you want to see," he said.

3. Use third person. Don't say "our students" or "Our principal" or "Some of our students..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "This plan is so cool..." without attributing that quote to someone or "The school should ..." These statements are personal opinions and cannot be made in a news story.

4. Note how in the earlier example of transition/quote, each quote is its own paragraph. Don't be afraid to use one- and two-sentence paragraphs. Journalistic writing consists mostly of one and two-sentence paragraphs.

SAMPLE STORY

A 40-minute flex period could be added to the schedule after spring break if the school board approves Principal John Eduardo's proposal at its meeting tomorrow. The daily flex period would serve as a study hall for students, Eduardo said.

"For more than a year, the Student Council officers have complained that homework loads have increased with the block schedule," he said. "The officers have been asking for some type of relief to help students out, and my administrative team has been exploring options."

This flex period would take place after first and fifth period every day. Both the Student Council and the Parent-Teacher Association support the proposal.

"The Student Council thinks it's a great idea," McKenzie Cooper, a junior and Student Council officer, said. "Eight classes is tough for students. We need some relief."

When the school switched to block scheduling two years ago, failure rates increased, Eduardo said.

"That is not something you want to see," he said.

Searching for options to help students, Eduardo visited two Central Texas schools that utilize the flex periods and was "sold" on the idea. Failure rates at those schools decreased after the flex period was added.

"At first, I worried that it would be wasted time, but I was amazed at the number of students working or getting help during the flex period at those schools," he said. "Very few students were just messing around."

If approved, the flex period will have an online check-in system where students can log where they will spend their time, Eduardo said.

"Each student will have an assigned flex teacher, but if they fill out the online flex portal, they can move to any teacher they want," Eduardo said. "Let's say I need help in geometry. Then, I can flex into that teacher's class and get help. I simply have to put that into the online system."

Freshman Wilson Ukeje said the flex period would help him.

"I feel like the only thing I do after school is homework," he said. "My parents also can not help me with my math anymore. If I could visit with my math teacher a few times a week, I would have a much better grade in math."

However, only half of the faculty members are on board with the proposal because it will cut 10 minutes of instructional time from every period. Changing to block scheduling decreased the hours of instruction each year by 35. The flex period would cut out another 11 hours each year.

"I only see the students two to three times a week," AP World History teacher Esmi Vega said. "Now, the administration wants to make our class time even shorter. I don't know how I will get through the curriculum."

Vega said if the board approves the flex time, her students won't be prepared for the AP test.

"The AP teachers do not support the flex period," Vega said. "We can't. We don't have enough time to cover the curriculum."

Despite faculty concerns, Eduardo said he believes this is the best option for students.

"If this helps our passing rate and our student stress, then it's worth it," Eduardo said. "Teachers will need to be more creative with how they teach and possibly condense some information."

News Writing

Invitational B Meet • 2020



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a **news story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **45 minutes**. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 1,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. During the month of March, the school counselors offer parent/student conferences for all ninth grade students. Each student gets a 30-minute time slot to meet with his or her counselor about graduation plans, course options and college and career planning. Since the counselors started holding freshman conferences, they always have offered conferences before school and after school to accommodate parents who work. This year, Principal Brayden Johnson decided that all conferences would take place during the school day.

Currently, the school has 335 freshman students. Only 90 freshmen have had their conferences, and another 40 are scheduled for later this month. More than half the freshman parents have not scheduled a conference. Last year, the five school counselors had conferences with 95% of the freshmen and their parents.

After hearing about the low turnout, the Parent Teacher Association asked Johnson to allow counselors to add conferences during non-school hours. Johnson agreed. The counselors will offer conferences before school and after school for the last week of March — March 23-27.

Freshmen and their parents will be able to sign up for the new spots on the counselors' website starting Friday, March 13. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Thursday, March 12.

■ BRAYDEN JOHNSON, principal

"I instructed the counselors to hold freshman conferences only during school hours because I thought it was unfair to ask them to work before school and after school for an entire month without extra pay. They have done that without complaining for years, but I don't think it's right. We don't have the funds to pay overtime. I wish we did.

"I understand it's hard for parents to take off from work, but if we don't limit the number of before-school and after-school appointments, our counselors will work 14-hour days for almost an entire month. That's too much to ask. After meeting with the PTA, I agreed to allow morning conferences and after-school conferences for one week. But those conferences will be limited to 15 minutes each. I encourage as many parents as possible to meet with the counselors during the school day."

■ **SUE CHE, counselor**

“All of the counselors appreciate what Mr. Johnson is trying to do, but I don’t think it’s feasible with our population. Too many of our parents work and can’t take off from work. I would rather give up a few mornings and evenings so our students can have the best plans for graduation and life after.

“Those early morning and after-school conference appointments will go quickly. Parents need to log into our website as soon as possible on Friday to pick their appointment. I don’t think Mr. Johnson is going to open up more spots.

“I want parents to understand how important these meetings are. We work with the student and parent to plan the graduation path and the student’s path after high school. For instance, if a student wants to attend a four-year university, then it’s imperative that the student take three years of a language. We look at what the student wants after high school and devise a four-year plan to help him or her get there.”

■ **MARIANA MARISOL, PTA president**

“We are grateful that Mr. Johnson was responsive to parents’ needs. I agree that it’s not ideal for counselors to work 14-hour days, but some parents can’t make a meeting during school hours. The PTA is encouraging every parent to schedule a conference, and we are encouraging those parents who are able to meet during the day to leave the before-school and after-school spots for other parents. I had a freshman conference for each of my children, and they proved invaluable. I learned so much from those conferences.

“To make life a little easier for our counselors, the PTA is going to provide them with breakfast and dinner during that week of early morning and evening conferences.”

■ **CHRISSEY TIEGER, freshman parent**

“I am one of those parents who can’t take off from work. I am happy Mr. Johnson agreed to open before-school and after-school spots. We definitely will sign up this Friday. I know the conferences are important. Both my son and I have several questions for the counselor.”

■ **HAYDEN LUCAS, freshman**

“My mom is a single mom, and she can’t take time off from work. She used all of her sick and vacation time to care for my grandmother after she had a stroke. Before the new schedule was announced, I asked the counselor if I could do the conference by myself, but parents are required. My mom will be able to make an early morning conference. We are scheduling it as soon as we can on Friday.”

■ **FRANNIE SMITH, sophomore**

“I learned so much from my conference last year. My counselor helped us map out a plan to increase my chances to get into an Ivy League college. I joined several new clubs and took on leadership positions, and I learned that I should never take an off period. It doesn’t look good on your transcript.”

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INVITATIONAL B • 2020

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1. Open with a future lead under the present circumstances. In this instance, the story comes out before parents can sign up for the counselor conferences.

Because of low turnout at counselor conferences for freshman students and parents, Principal Brayden Johnson will permit the meetings to be scheduled outside of school hours for the last week of March to accommodate working parents. Parents can sign up for the new spots on the counselors' website starting tomorrow.

2. Use direct quotes and get those quotes early in the story. After you introduce quotes, use the transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Stuess said," not "said Stuess.") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes from different people together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

Of the 335 freshman students, only 90 have had their 30-minute meeting so far, and 40 have scheduled one for later in the month. Last year, the five counselors were able to meet with 95% of the freshman class.

direct quote

"I want parents to understand how important these meetings are," Che said. "We work with the student and parent to plan the graduation path and the student's path after high school."

transition

Initially, Johnson said he made the decision to offer conferences only during school hours because he thought it was unfair to ask counselors to work overtime without pay.

direct quote

"I understand it's hard for parents to take off from work, but if we don't limit the number of before school and after school appointments, our counselors will work 14-hour days for almost an entire month," Johnson said. "That's too much to ask."

3. Use third person. Don't say "our students" or "our counselor Sue Che" or "Some of our students..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "The counselors are so smart..." without attributing that quote to someone or "The school should ..." These statements are personal opinions and cannot be made in a news story.

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"Those early morning and after-school conference appointments will go quickly," counselor Sue Che said. "Parents need to log into our website as soon as possible on Friday to pick their appointment."

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"I want parents to understand how important these meetings are," Che said. "We work with the student and parent to plan the graduation path and the student's path after high school."

Initially, Johnson said he made the decision to offer conferences only during school hours because he thought it was unfair to ask counselors to work overtime without pay.

"I understand it's hard for parents to take off from work, but if we don't limit the number of before-school and after-school appointments, our counselors will work 14-hour days for almost an entire month," Johnson said. "That's too much to ask."

The before-school and after-school conferences will be limited to 15 minutes.

"I encourage as many parents as possible to meet with the counselors during the school day," Johnson said.

Johnson agreed to add these time slots after a request from the Parent Teacher Association.

"We are grateful that Mr. Johnson was responsive to parents' needs," PTA president Mariana Marisol said. "To make life a little easier for our counselors, the PTA is going to provide them with breakfast and dinner during that week of early morning and evening conferences."

Freshman Hayden Lucas said his mom is a single mom and is unable to take time off from work because she used her sick and vacation time to care for his grandmother when she had a stroke.

"Before the new schedule was announced, I asked the counselor if I could do the conference by myself, but parents are required," Lucas said. "My mom will be able to make an early morning conference. We are scheduling as soon as we can on Friday."

Parent Chrissy Tieger said she is also unable to take time off from work and is grateful for the new options.

"We definitely will sign up this Friday," Tieger said. "I know the conferences are important."

News Writing

District Meet • 2020



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Leaguetown High School has 1,100 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Principal Gwen Stefens announced this week that seniors will have a mandatory “Adulthood Day” of seminars on April 9. Students will choose two three-hour seminars on topics including personal finance, basic car care, dorm room cooking, healthy relationships and boundaries, resume and cover letter writing, and household chores such as laundry and grocery shopping. The seniors will have 12 seminars as options. The Adulthood Day was a suggestion from the counseling staff.

Seniors can sign up for their first, second and third choices through an online portal starting at 7 a.m. Wednesday, April 1. The portal will close at 9 p.m. Friday, April 3. Each seminar will be limited to 30 students. The counselors will assign seminars to seniors who don’t submit their preferences.

The district will cover the cost to bring in professionals to teach the seminars through proceeds from vending machines and school spirit wear. Stefens said the cost for instructors and supplies will be \$8,000.

While no seniors have complained to Stefens about the day, a group of 10 parents did. They are upset the Adulthood Day is mandatory and the seminars are not academic-based. The parents asked Superintendent Adam Levy to make the day optional for students or add academic-based seminars. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, March 31.

■ GWEN STEFENS, principal

“Some of the seminars were ideas from our students. After the counselors pitched this idea to me in January, I brought in a group of seniors and asked them about the idea. They loved it and suggested the healthy relationship seminar and the household chores seminar. I have received nothing but positive feedback from our students. The only complaint they have is that they want to do more than one day of seminars. They said it’s too hard to choose only two.

“I spoke with that group of parents, but we are sticking to our plan. Our seniors get academic-based curriculum every day, and I will argue that these seminars are academically based. You have to know math to understand cooking. You have to use critical thinking to deal with personal finances. I am sorry these parents are unhappy, but our seniors are happy and so is the faculty. They also support the day.”

■ **BLAKE CHELTON, senior**

“I love this idea and so do my friends. Honestly, I have no idea how to do laundry or what to buy at a grocery store. I don’t feel like I ever have time to learn those things. I am always either studying for an AP [advanced placement] class or practicing baseball. It will be nice to spend a day learning some skills that I will actually use next year. My first choice is going to be dorm cooking, but I can’t decide about the other seminar and my back-up. I am headed to Princeton in the fall and will be staying in the dorms. I want to know how to cook more than popcorn, which is about all I can cook right now.”

■ **KELLI CLARKVILLE, senior**

“I am pumped about the Adulting Day. When Ms. Stefens first announced it, I wasn’t sure what she meant. I plan to pick my classes at 7:01 a.m. on Wednesday. I want to make sure I get my first two choices — basic car care and personal finance. My brother was supposed to teach me how to change a tire before he left for college last year, but he never got around to it. My mom is a single parent and is clueless about cars. I finally saved enough money to buy a used car, and I want to know how to take care of it.”

■ **JACKIE HOOT, counselor**

“Our students are graduating from high school lacking basic survival skills. We no longer teach home economics, personal finance or auto mechanics and, as a result, our students are suffering. We attended a conference in Kentucky where schools have embraced the Adulting Day, and we thought it was a great idea.”

■ **JOHNNA LEGAND, senior parent**

“It’s nice that the school is thinking about so-called ‘soft skills’ that our teens may need, but I cannot support the teaching of them during the academic day. Our AP [advanced placement] teachers already complain that they do not have enough time to cover all of the material. We should not take another day away from them. The school needs to offer these seminars after school or on a Saturday. They should not be mandatory or during the school day.”

■ **ADAM LEVY, superintendent**

“I have no plans to change anything. I understand the parents’ concerns, but I have spoken with several teachers and the administrative team. None of them believe this day will negatively impact student test scores. I applaud our counselors for thinking outside of the box to meet our students’ needs.”

■ **CARSYN WEEKLY, AP English teacher**

“AP teachers do struggle to cover all of the curriculum before the AP tests, but missing one day of curriculum isn’t going to be a disaster for our students. Our seniors need this Adulting Day, and our faculty is committed to making it work. Somehow, we figure out ways to accommodate pep rallies and field trips. We can handle this, too.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The school will bring in professionals to teach the seminars, and most seminars will include a hands-on component. For example, students in the basic car care seminar will change a tire.

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DISTRICT • 2020 NEWS WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

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1. As a general rule, open with a future lead. Here, the story comes out before students sign up for Adulting Day seminars.

An online sign-up portal for the senior Adulting Day opens at 7 a.m. tomorrow and closes at 9 p.m. Friday. Seniors may choose their first, second and third choice from 12 seminars for the day. Adulting Day will be April 9.

Each seminar will be capped at 30, and counselors will assign seminars to those who do not submit their preferences in time.

2. Use direct quotes early in the story. After you introduce quotes, use the transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Hoot said," not "said Hoot.") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes from different people together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

The counselors suggested Adulting Day after attending a conference in Kentucky where many schools have implemented similar programs.

direct quote

"Our students are graduating from high school lacking basic survival skills," counselor Jackie Hoot said. "We no longer teach home economics, personal finance or auto mechanics and, as a result, our students are suffering."

transition

For the day, seniors will choose two three-hour seminars. The list includes personal finance, dorm room cooking, resume and cover letter writing, and household chores.

direct quote

"My first choice is going to be dorm cooking, but I can't decide about the other seminar and my back-up," senior Blake Chelton said. "I am headed to Princeton in the fall and will be staying in the dorms. I want to know how to cook more than popcorn, which is about all I can cook right now."

3. Use third person. Don't say "our students" or "our counselor Jackie Hoot" or "Some of our students..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "The counselors are so smart..." without attributing that quote to someone or "The school should..."

4. Note how in the earlier example of transition/quote, each quote is its own paragraph. Don't be afraid to use one or two-sentence paragraphs.

SAMPLE STORY

An online sign-up portal for the senior Adulthood Day opens at 7 a.m. tomorrow and closes at 9 p.m. Friday. Seniors may choose their first, second and third choice from 12 different seminars for the day. Adulthood Day will be April 9.

Each seminar will be capped at 30, and counselors will assign seminars to those who do not submit their preferences in time.

“I plan to pick my classes at 7:01 a.m. on Wednesday,” senior Kelli Clarkville said. “I want to make sure I get my first two choices — basic car care and personal finance. I finally saved enough money to buy a used car, and I want to know how to take care of it.”

The counselors suggested Adulthood Day after attending a conference in Kentucky where many schools have implemented similar programs.

“Our students are graduating from high school lacking basic survival skills,” counselor Jackie Hoot said. “We no longer teach home economics, personal finance or auto mechanics and, as a result, our students are suffering.”

For the day, seniors will choose two three-hour seminars. The list includes personal finance, dorm room cooking, resume and cover letter writing, and household chores.

“My first choice is going to be dorm-cooking, but I can’t decide about the other seminar and my back-up,” senior Blake Chelton said. “I am headed to Princeton in the fall and will be staying in the dorms. I want to know how to cook more than popcorn, which is about all I can cook right now.”

The district will provide \$8,000 to bring in professionals and provide supplies for hands-on activities in each course. Some of the seminar topics were ideas directly from seniors, Principal Gwen Stefens said.

“After the counselors pitched this idea to me in January, I brought in a group of seniors and asked them about the idea,” she said. “They loved it and suggested the healthy relationship seminar and the household chores seminar.”

Though Stefens said she has heard nothing but positive comments about the day from teachers and students, a group of 10 parents complained that the classes are mandatory and the content is not academic-based.

“It’s nice that the school is thinking about so-called ‘soft skills’ that our teens may need, but I cannot support the teaching of them during the academic day,” parent Johnna Legand said. “Our AP [advanced placement] teachers already complain that they do not have enough time to cover all of the material. We should not take another day away from them.”

These parents also reached out to Superintendent Adam Levy and asked he either make the day optional for students or add academic-based options.

“I have no plans of changing anything,” Levy said. “I understand the parents’ concerns, but I have spoken with several teachers and the administrative team. None of them feel like this day will negatively impact student test scores.”

AP English teacher Carsyn Weekly said missing one day is not going to be a “disaster” for seniors.

“Our seniors need this Adulthood Day, and our faculty is committed to making it work,” she said.

News Writing

Region Meet • 2020



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Leaguetown High School has 3,400 students enrolled in grades 9-12. For the past four years, the high school has held graduation at the district's activity center. Because of the size constraints of the activity center, each senior has been limited to three seats for family and friends at graduation. The activity center holds 3,500 people, and last year's graduating class was almost 800 students. The district moved graduation to the activity center after a tornado destroyed the city's event center in 2015. The city chose not to rebuild the event center, which held 20,000.

Every year since the move to the smaller facility, parents have complained to the district. This fall, parents again requested a larger venue for graduation, but the district denied the request because of funding and set graduation for Wednesday, May 20. Last week, the mayor of Southside offered its city's event center for graduation on Saturday, May 23 (which is Memorial Day weekend). An opera singer who was scheduled to perform at the Southside center on that date cancelled her tour. The mayor offered to waive the normal rental cost and said the district would have to pay only \$4,000 to cover overtime salaries of the workers.

Superintendent Lucia Niforatos said the district can afford that cost and asked the school board to approve the move for graduation. At this venue, which has a 30,000 capacity, the limit on the number of guests at graduation would be lifted.

The school board will vote on the matter at its meeting Thursday, April 23. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Monday, April 20.

■ LUCIA NIFORATOS, superintendent

"I know it is late in the year to change graduation. The Southside mayor didn't contact me until last week. I moved as quickly as I could. The event center had a last-minute cancellation. Basically, the mayor is giving us the venue for free. We only have to cover the workers' salaries for that day. This is a great bargain. I know some seniors have a trip to Mexico planned for that weekend, but this move is the right one for the majority of our students."

■ ANDRES MART, senior

"I would love to have graduation at the Southside facility, but the informal senior class trip is set for Memorial Day weekend. Approximately 200 of us are going to Cancun for four days, and we've already paid our non-refundable payment for the trip. If the school board moves graduation, I will miss my own graduation. I'm not going to lose my \$700 or miss a trip to Cancun."

■ **SOPHIE RENDON, senior**

“I want the board to move graduation. My grandparents won’t be able to come to my graduation if we don’t move it. I have four grandparents, so it’s not fair to let only one come. Plus, the majority of the senior class is not going to Cancun. I bet all of those parents could afford to pay for a different trip for their kids. If it was a school-sponsored senior trip, I would feel different, but it’s not.”

■ **SYLVIA LANTER, senior parent**

“I appreciate the Southside mayor offering the city’s event center, but it’s too late to change graduation. My son is going on the Cancun trip, and we will be out a lot of money if he goes to graduation instead of Cancun. The school board needs to leave graduation where it is.”

■ **JACK O’CONNOR, senior and valedictorian**

“I oppose moving graduation. I am not going to Cancun, but 200 of my classmates are. I think they deserve to be at graduation. Also, my grandparents are going to London for Memorial Day weekend, so they would miss my graduation speech if the district moves it.”

■ **BRENNA BAILER, local travel agent**

“I arranged the four-day senior trip three months ago. We got an excellent deal for the students, but it is a non-refundable trip. That is one of the reasons why the rates were so cheap. We cannot change the dates for the trip or get refunds for the students. If graduation is moved, they will have to choose.”

■ **NIKKI WALLER, senior parent**

“The district needs to jump on this opportunity. Senior parents have asked so many times over the past five years for a larger venue. Now that we are offered it, some are balking because their kids might miss a trip to Mexico. If they don’t want to change the trip, then that’s fine. The school can hold graduation without those students, or maybe the district could do some small ceremony for them before they go. The majority of students can attend on the new date, and they want the new date. The school board should act in the best interest of the majority.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Seniors were surveyed in their English classes about the new venue and new date, and 70% support the move.

School board members refused to comment before the Thursday meeting.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

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NEWS WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. As a general rule, open with a future lead. Here, the story comes out before the board will vote on moving graduation.

Nearly 200 seniors will have to choose between walking the stage at graduation or vacationing in Cancun if the school board votes Thursday to change the date of graduation from May 20 to May 23, so the event can be held at a larger venue.

2. Use direct quotes early in the story. After you introduce quotes, use the transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Niforatos said," not "said Niforatos") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes from different people together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

Since a tornado destroyed the city's event center in 2015, graduation has been held at the district's activity center, which holds only 3,500 people and limits graduates to three guests. Last week, the mayor of Southside offered the district the use of his city's event center, which seats 30,000.

direct quote

"I know this is late in the year to change graduation," Superintendent Lucia Niforatos said. "I know some seniors have a trip to Mexico planned for that weekend, but this move is the right one for the majority of our students."

transition

In a survey, 70% of the senior class said they support the move.

direct quote

"The majority of students can attend on the new date, and they want the new date," senior parent Nikki Waller said. "The school board should act in the best interest of the majority."

3. Use third person. Don't say "our students" or "our Superintendent Lucia Niforatos" or "Some of our students..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "The Superintendent is so smart..." without attributing that quote to someone or "The board should..."

4. Note how in the earlier example of transition/quote, each quote is its own paragraph. Don't be afraid to use one or two-sentence paragraphs.

SAMPLE STORY

Nearly 200 seniors will have to choose between walking the stage at graduation or vacationing in Cancun if the school board votes Thursday to change the date of graduation from May 20 to May 23, so the event can be held at a larger venue.

Since a tornado destroyed the city's event center in 2015, graduation has been held at the district's activity center, which holds only 3,500 people and limits graduates to three guests. Last week, the mayor of Southside offered the district the use of his city's event center, which seats 30,000.

"I know this is late in the year to change graduation," Superintendent Lucia Niforatos said. "I know some seniors have a trip to Mexico planned for that weekend, but this move is the right one for the majority of our students."

In a survey, 70% of the senior class said they support the move.

"The majority of students can attend on the new date, and they want the new date," senior parent Nikki Waller said. "The school board should act in the best interest of the majority."

Earlier this fall, parents requested a larger venue for graduation, but the district denied the request because of funding and set graduation for May 20.

"The event center had a last-minute cancellation," Niforatos said. "Basically, the mayor is giving us the venue for free. We only have to cover the workers' salaries for that day."

The unofficial four-day senior trip to Cancun was planned three months ago and is non-refundable.

"That is one of the reasons why the rates were so cheap," local travel agent Brenna Bailer said. "We cannot change the dates for the trip or get refunds for the students. If graduation is moved, they will have to choose."

Waller said the district needs to jump on this opportunity because senior parents have asked for a larger venue since the city event was destroyed five years ago.

"Now that we are offered it, some are balking because their kids might miss a trip to Mexico," she said.

Senior Andres Mart, who is booked on the Cancun trip, said he would choose it over graduation.

"If the school board moves graduation, I will miss my own graduation," Mart said. "I'm not going to lose my \$700."

Senior Sophie Rendon supports the move because of the three-person guest limit at the district facility.

"I have four grandparents, so it's not fair to only let one come," Rendon said. "Plus, the majority of the senior class is not going to Cancun. If it was a school-sponsored senior trip, I would feel different, but it's not."

Because he thinks all seniors deserve to be at graduation, valedictorian Jack O'Connor said he opposes the venue change.

"Also, my grandparents are going to London for Memorial Day weekend, so they would miss my graduation speech if the district moves it," he said.

Senior parent Sylvia Lanter said it's too late to change the venue.

"My son is going on the Cancun trip, and we will be out a lot of money if he goes to graduation instead of Cancun," Lanter said. "The school board needs to leave graduation where it is and look for possible changes for next year."

School board members refused to comment before their meeting on Thursday.